

## *Civic Engagement*

### *Starting A Farmers Market In Spring Lake*

When the Sandhills Family Heritage Association (SFHA) set out to create a Farmer's Market in Spring Lake, we were unaware we were about to embark on the long and sometimes, tedious, road of local public policy. Our efforts, however, proved entirely worthwhile. The farmer's market will create an economic opportunity for local landowners, make healthy food available to a greater number of community members, and help educate SFHA members about how local government functions.

The process to establish a farmer's market began almost from scratch, as the Town of Spring Lake required an amendment to its town ordinances to allow establishment of a farmer's market on Chapel Hill Road. During this preliminary phase, SFHA worked with the Town to amend the town ordinance to allow a farmers market, and then went through a rezoning process.

Once approved, SFHA was required to hire a professional architect to develop a site plan and construction plan for the farmers market. Although a considerable expense, this was needed to show how the proposed market would fit with the anticipated uses of the farmers market site. These plans were then taken to the SFHA Board and membership for review and approval. After numerous questions, clarifications and review all were satisfied that this was a sound plan consistent with the organization's goals, and that it would benefit the community, the membership and the caretakers of the land—our farmers.

Then the governmental approval process began. This was a two phase, two tier process that took several months. The SFHA Executive Director, Ammie Jenkins, remained a faithful shepherd of the process, ensuring that the appropriate steps were followed and that momentum remained focused on the ultimate goal. Mrs. Jenkins presented the farmer's market plan before the Spring Lake Board of Alderman. Following her presentation and questions from members of the community, the proposal was approved with referral to the Spring Lake Board of Adjustment, the next process.

At the Board of Adjustment meeting, Mrs. Jenkins was sworn in on the Holy Bible to "solemnly tell the truth" about SFHA plans for this venture, and the provisions committed by the organization to assure the Farmer's Market's fit with the Chapel Hill Road community. The Board was particularly focused on the new farmer's market ordinance guidelines in helping form their decision on the proposed market. Keep in mind there has not been a Farmer's Market in Spring Lake, so some precedent setting was presented by the proposal.

The Board of Adjustment approved the farmer’s market on a temporary basis, with conditions that included health and sanitation provisions related to hand-washing and trash disposal, construction quality and appearance stipulations, and a mid-term review in six months.

The final step was completed when SFHA was granted a Conditional Use Permit. The farmers’ market structure was completed, approved by Spring Lake Inspection Department, certificate of occupancy was issued, and business license obtained. SFHA’s long journey through the local public process ended when the Sandhills Farmers Market became the first and only farmers market in Cumberland County to be written in a town ordinance. Despite the many steps necessary to proceed with this project, it has been a labor of love from SFHA to the community. The establishment of Sandhills Farmer’s Market is a tangible means of developing a healthy local economy, using the region’s land resources and promoting healthy eating habits. It provides another resource for the community that capitalizes on its assets.

What a great partnership--farmers, SFHA, NC Department of agriculture, The Conservation Fund’s Resourceful Communities Program, and the town of Spring Lake, working together for economic development and neighborhood revitalization!

